

# Commish: Pandemic will occur

★ Sullivan Co. plan praised  
as example for rest of state

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John Stephen is as sure there will be a pandemic in New Hampshire as he is sure California will have another earthquake.

"There's going to be a pandemic, the issue is when," Stephen, the Department of Health and Human Services Commissioner said Wednesday.

He visited Newport for the Greater Sullivan County All Hazards Region Committee meeting to discuss what steps to take before that pandemic or public health emergency hits. Stephen, who has visited 10 counties, said the Sullivan Country region model, although it still needs some work, could be an example for the rest of the state. The hazards committee needs to be closely aligned with hospitals, police and county representatives, Stephen said.

The audience of some 35 people comprised nurses, selectmen, health officials, town administrators, one citizen and representa-

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tives from the school board and police and fire departments.

The pandemic plan is still in the design stages. A draft of the Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan was distributed by Jane Hubbard of Hubbard Consultants LLC at the meeting. She was hired as a consultant using grant money.

"A public health emergency could be anything from A to Z," Hubbard said.

Natural hazards are laid out in the draft plan, including flooding, drought and winter weather. Other hazards are listed as an armed attack, biological terrorism, civil disorder and transport incident.

Some audience members were skeptical the issue is being dealt with.

"Before I start on a trip I want to have an idea of where I'm going," said Sutton selectman Bob Wright.

The issue is new for the nation and plans are not locked in, Stephen said.

The state is purchasing

Tamiflu and Relenza, brand names for anti-viral medication, to cover the estimated 30 percent of the population that may become infected with influenza. The medicine has a shelf life of five to six years, Stephen said.

Although a time line for a possible outbreak wasn't given, every state is on a purchasing list for the medicines.

"If you don't get into that line, your allotment will be sent to California or some other state," Stephen said.

He said he doesn't want to waste taxpayers' dollars, but had to weigh the public health risk. There will be 300,000 doses for first responders and New Hampshire citizens. The stock-piled medicine will be stored in four places throughout the state. It is also estimated that the county will need 50 additional hospital beds to be set up at alternative locations.

Hubbard has grouped Sullivan County into four points of distribution and a regional public information office needs to be

established, she said. The facilities also need to be identified. Funding the medical supplies, such as needles, tubing and equipment will be left for another meeting, she said.

In the next few months after the regional plan is brought to the state, \$20,000 in funding will be released for the planning stage, Mary Ann Cooney, director of the division of public health services said. The federal government gave the state \$1.3 million, of which 73 percent is for local communities, she said. That money must be used by Sept. 1, 2007.

Stephen thinks New Hampshire, which was the first state in the nation to have a statewide Avian Flu drill, is ahead of the rest of the states in preparedness. The key issue for the county is to be able to exercise the plans, he said. Those plans should include alternative standards of care, such as veterinarians who could administer shots or retired doctors and nurses.

"It is not something that is clear-cut," Stephen said.